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House of Representatives
COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA
HARRISBURG

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RULES COMMITTEE

April 28, 2008

Victoria Rutson, Chief
Section of Environmental Analysis
Surface Transportation Board
395 E Street, S.W.
Washington, DC 20423-0001

Dear Ms. Rutson:

Please consider my request that a full environmental analysis and environmental impact study be commissioned to study the effects of the proposed rail line construction and operation by the RJ Corman Railroad Co. between Wallaceeton and Gorton in Clearfield and Centre counties, Pa. (Finance Docket No. 35116).

The proposed route would terminate a highly successful rail-to-trails route that has been operating since the mid-1990s. The rails-to-trails is a major ingredient to the Pennsylvania Wilds tourism-promotion effort that has been helping to rejuvenate the central Pennsylvania area. Numerous businesses – from restaurants to sporting goods and outdoor travel agencies – have emerged to take advantage of the natural beauty of the area. Hundreds of homesteads and campsites – built to take advantage of the area's natural resources -- are located within the project area. The Moshannon Forest Property Owners Association is one of many local groups opposed to this project.

Pennsylvania has invested taxpayers' dollars in promoting the region's tourism and outdoor potential, including:

- The Pa. Department of Conservation and Natural Resources awarded \$65,000 in 1999 to the Headwaters Charitable Trust to rehabilitate structures on the Snow Shoe Rail Trail in Cooper Township, Clearfield County, and Rush and Snow Shoe townships, Centre County.
- A \$300,000 Growing Greener grant in 1999 through the Pa. Department of Environmental Protection to the Beech Creek Watershed Association for the Jonathan run acid mine drainage restoration.

- A \$90,000 Growing Greener grant in 2000 through the Pa. Department of Environmental Protection to the Beech Creek Watershed Association for Tributary "K" and Contrary Run sub watershed assessment and restorative design.

Perhaps the most compelling reason this project requires the most stringent environmental assessment and impact review is the region's unique and complicated geology.

According to a geological study of the area ["Influence of geology on postmining water quality: Northern Appalachian Basin"], "mines in the brackish areas of Clearfield County are notorious for producing acid mine drainage..."

The report highlighted the complexities:

Glass et al. (1977) dedicated their report to George Hall Ashley (1866-1951) a former State Geologist of Pennsylvania and "life-long combatant with the perplexing rocks of southeastern Clearfield County." They point out that their work is built upon his foundation and that "(t)he geology was not as difficult as you thought, Dr. Ashley - it was worse!"

Pennsylvania is paying dearly for the lack of responsible environmental oversight in the Clearfield and Centre counties region. In 1996, a congressman from Pennsylvania erased the environmental-impact requirement in a federal spending bill that included millions for construction of nearby Interstate 99 through Centre County. When the land was excavated for the highway project, the disturbed acidic rock wreaked environmental havoc on water supplies. As of November 2007, the state's cost to remediate the pollution had hit \$79 million.

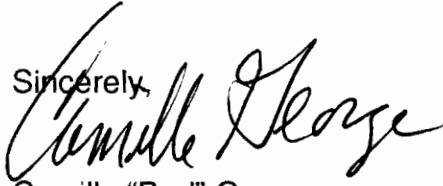
The potential liability – environmental and financial – of the proposed rail project warrants a complete environmental assessment. The proposed project runs counter to the millions of dollars spent on the region to address pollution from mining, development of suitable industries, and to promote tourism in the region.

I realize you probably have little interest in the politics behind the biofuels/landfill project that is the impetus for the rail line. However, I suggest it has a strong link to the environmental effects that you are seeking input on. It is a textbook case of for-profit landfill developers from urban areas seeking rural areas with weak zoning protections to build landfills that would be unacceptable in more populated areas.

As majority chairman of the Pa. House of Representatives' Environmental Resources and Energy Committee, I can testify to how unfair this process is to rural areas, which often don't have the money, time or expertise to fight these proposals on level ground. Right now, I have three landfills proposed within 25 miles of my doorstep.

I represent a portion of the affected area, Cooper Township, and can vouch for the local opposition to this proposal. It also has been opposed by the county commissioners in both Centre and Clearfield counties and the Centre County Planning Commission.

Thank you for consideration of this request. I think any full and fair environmental analysis of this proposal would show it to be inimical to the environmental and economic best interests of the region.

Sincerely,

Camille "Bud" George
STATE REPRESENTATIVE

CG/mjm
CC: Terri Burbidge